

As an interpreter who works in VRS, I would like to comment on the FNPRM which seeks comment on whether or not to establish a different standard for VRS interpreters than the current standard which was established for CAs working in the traditional relay environment in regard to the interpreter staying with a call for 10 minutes, asking questions to the VRS user during call set up, and abuse of CAs (interpreters).

First of all, I think it is important to remember that the interpreters who work in VRS are interpreters first. When we walk into the VRS call center, we do not take off our interpreting hat and put on a CA hat. You might say that we need to be able to wear both hats at the same time.

While the FCC has not mandated that interpreters be certified to work in VRS, the "industry standard" has been established that certification needs to be a requirement in order to ensure the provision of quality interpreting services. That being the case, it is important to take into consideration the Code of Ethics that interpreters must follow in order to maintain their certification. If the requirements placed on VRS interpreters cause them to violate that Code of Ethics, grievances can be filed against the interpreters by the Deaf callers, and the interpreters can lose their certification. If they lose their certification, they would then lose their job, since all the service providers require certification to be eligible to work in the VRS call centers. For this reason, there do need to be changes made in the requirements that were originally established for CA's who work in the traditional relay environment.

One of the tenets of the Code of Ethics states, "Interpreters/translators shall render the message faithfully, always conveying the content and spirit of the speaker using language most readily understood by the person(s) whom they serve." Another tenet states, "Interpreters/translators shall accept assignments using discretion with regard to skill, setting, and the consumers involved." Under the current FCC regulations, interpreters are required to stay with a call for 10 minutes, regardless of content or ability to interpret the message effectively. While this rule was logical for CAs working in the TRS environment, it becomes a conflict for interpreters, because they may have trouble understanding the caller, or they may feel very strongly about the content of the message, thereby making it difficult to render an interpretation that truly conveys the full "spirit of the speaker". When considering this point, please remember that we are working in a visual environment. We are not able to hide the expressions on our face...they will be obvious to the caller. As an example, if a VRS interpreter has strong feelings against abortion, and is asked to place a call to an abortion clinic, the interpreter may find it impossible to hide his/her feelings about that situation. Similarly, if an interpreter is a strong proponent of abortion rights, and is asked to relay a call that is trying to convince a woman who has been raped and is in emotional distress not to have an abortion, that interpreter might find it difficult or impossible to convey the "spirit of the speaker". Each of these situations could be handled with no difficulty by allowing the interpreter to switch with another

interpreter who has no problem handling that type of call. For this reason, I believe the "10 minute rule", as it is now being called, should be waived for VRS interpreters.

With regard to the question of VRS interpreters being able to ask questions to the VRS user during call set-up, it would certainly seem that if the Deaf person doesn't mind giving a little information about the nature of the call, it would help the call to go much smoother. When dealing with ASL, knowing the context that is being discussed is critical to rendering the proper interpretation. Most of the signs in ASL can mean more than one thing, depending on context. If interpreters were able to gather basic context information, such as the nature of the call, i.e. business, personal, medical, etc., who the Deaf person is calling for, the name of the caller and a general idea of the purpose of the call, the interpreter would be able to provide a much smoother, more error-free interpretation. It is common practice in the interpreting field to gather as much information as possible before starting an interpreting assignment. If the FCC would like to provide the Deaf caller with the ability to make calls as smooth as possible, thereby as successful as possible, they should allow the interpreters to gather a limited amount of information before placing the call, as long as the caller doesn't mind giving this prior information.

Lastly, on the issue of abuse of CAs (interpreters) I think it is important again to remember that interpreters are working in a visual environment. While a TRS CA may be required to handle calls that have potentially offensive content, they are not having to view this content and convey the content and spirit of the speaker in a visual medium. It is important to note that if an interpreter does interpret for a sexually explicit call, and truly does convey the message with the spirit of the speaker, the interpreter has no way to know if the Deaf person is videotaping the phone call. Such a videotape could then be duplicated and distributed to any number of people. I think it is inappropriate to require that of any employee of any company, regardless of the profession.

While the goal of TRS and VRS is to provide a functionally equivalent mode of placing a phone call to that of a hearing caller, I think that the line has to be drawn somewhere. In an era where a person can lose their job for having sexually explicit material in their office, and where companies can be sued for allowing that material to remain, I find it hard to believe that requiring CAs or interpreters to put up with this type of a call is even being considered.

Another aspect that should be considered is the possibility that an employee could sue their employer for sexual harassment if the company refuses to pay them at the same rate as the VRS interpreters even though the employee is unable to work in VRS due to the possibility of having to interpret a sexually explicit call. The employee could make the case that they are being denied a "promotion" or pay increase because they are unwilling to be exposed to sexual content in phone calls. If the employee is otherwise qualified to work in VRS, this could be a reasonable argument. At the very least, the FCC needs to allow the

interpreters to switch out, regardless of time on the call, if this kind of content is offensive to the interpreter.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my comments.